

THE LIFE OF REBBETZIN MENUCHA ROCHEL SLONIM

PARSHAT VAYEISHEV

17 - 23 Kislev 5786
7 - 13 December 2025

Torah: Genesis 37:1-40:23
Haftorah: Amos 2:6-3:8

PSALMS DAILY

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalms 117

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.
2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal. Hallelujah!

(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

SEFER HAMITZVOT

Positive Mitzvah 245 Transactions

We are commanded regarding the various methods that effect transactions, i.e., the ways to transfer property from one individual to another.

Positive Mitzvah 243 The Paid Guardian and the Renter

We are commanded to follow the rules outlined in the Torah regarding a paid watchman and a renter. Similar rules regulate the both of them [in the event that the item being watched or rented is lost or damaged].

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ALEPH INSTITUTE
No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

A ray of light and hope dawned after 53 wrenching and arduous days. The exhausted family welcomed the little baby girl into her auspicious lineage and their challenging world.

The precious pink bundle entered the world at a critical time. The new Chabad movement was under fire. The holy founder - the genius and tzaddik Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi - had been imprisoned, charged with treason. He had sent funds to support the nascent Jewish community of Hebron. Since the land of Israel was under Turkish rule, he was charged with supporting the Ottoman empire, the enemy of the tsar.

Finally, after 53 days in the infamous Peter Paul prison, he was liberated. And on that very day, 19 Kislev 5559 (1798), a special girl was born to the Alter Rebbe's son and daughter-in-law, Rabbi Dov Ber and Rebbetzin Shaina. They named her Menucha Rochel.

Her middle name, Rochel, was after an aunt who had died at a young age, while her first name, Menucha, captured the hopes of the community. Menucha means "rest," "tranquility." "From now on, we will have a little menucha," her father said at her naming, expressing the fervent wish that this girl's birth and her grandfather's liberation were ushering in a new phase.

Indeed, as the girl grew into a woman, she filled the qualities embodied in her name, and brought special blessing and spiritual menucha to many.

In 5575 (1815), her father, the Mittler Rebbe, sought to strengthen the Jewish community in Hebron. One of Judaism's four holy cities, Hebron was the seat of much foundational Jewish history. The burial site of Adam and Eve, and all the patriarchs and matriarchs except for Rachel, it had also been King David's capital city from 2884 to 2892 (877-869 BCE), before Jerusalem. Over the many centuries of exile, it had fallen into neglect. The Rebbe sent groups of Chassidim to establish a Chabad presence in the city, encouraging Chassidim settled in Tzfat and Tiberias, in northern Israel, to move there as well. He bought the small synagogue and parcels of land near the historic Avraham Avinu synagogue.

As a young woman, Rebbetzin Menucha Rochel suffered a dangerous illness. Her father assured her that she would live and merit to emigrate to the Holy Land. In 5605 (1845), at the age of 47, Menucha Rochel Slonim and her

husband, Rabbi Yaakov Kuli Slonim, decided that it was time. They prepared to leave the secure and known environs of the court of Lubavitch and settle in Hebron. Her father had passed on, and her cousin, the Tzemach Tzedek, Rabbi Menachem Mendel, was the Rebbe. The time was approaching for the caravan to leave. Perhaps because her health was still tenuous, Menucha Rochel told the Tzemach Tzedek that she was afraid of traveling in the winter, during the cold rains. He told her, "Do not delay. You will travel between the raindrops!"

And so it was.

The first leg of the journey was from Lubavitch to Shklov, where they changed wagons. When the wagon driver for that portion came back to Lubavitch, he was overflowing with enthusiasm for his amazing trip. Not one drop of rain had fallen on his wagon, he told anyone and everyone. In contrast, his return trip, without his illustrious passengers, was different. His wagon wheels and horses were sunk deep in a wagon driver's constant adversary - pouring rain and thick mud. For the rest of his life, the wagon driver took great pride in relating this story.

Making the long and arduous journey was no simple matter. Such trips typically lasted months, traveling by wagon and via ship through hostile lands. And not too many amenities awaited them, as Hebron was considered unproductive, with a reputation of "being an asylum for the poor and the spiritual," with semi-urban, semi-peasant dwellings. At the time, there were approximately 45 to 60 Sephardic families, and an Ashkenazic community of about 50 mainly Chabad families.

When they finally arrived, it was the fitting completion of a circle. Menucha Rochel's illustrious grandfather, the Alter Rebbe, had been incarcerated for sending funds to Hebron, and now his granddaughter, born on the day of his liberation, had come to strengthen that very community.

The Slonims did much to revitalize the Jewish community, as did their descendants. Menucha Rochel quickly became known as a holy woman - famed for her wisdom, piety and erudition. Rabbis, common Jews and Arabs held her in high esteem, and sought her blessings and advice. New brides and barren women would request blessings from her.

Several anecdotes illustrate her unique spiritual powers.

The Jewish community of Hebron was plagued by a wild gang known as "The Black Hand." The marauding thugs

regularly broke into Jewish homes, robbing and plundering to the accompaniment of vicious curses and threats.

But one day, things changed.

A messenger showed up at the doorstep of Rebbetzin Menucha Rochel with an urgent plea. The gang leader's wife was in throes of a difficult labor; both she and the baby were in danger. The ferocious bandit was singing a different tune; having no choice, he swallowed his arrogance and begged for a blessing.

Her reply was clear. If the man would completely cease his reign of terror, then she would give her blessing and everything would be alright.

The ruffian immediately swore that he would stop the violence. He hurried home, where he found his healthy wife and new infant. He kept his word, and the Jews enjoyed a long respite, living in peaceful menucha.

A powerful Arab had absolute control over Hebron's water springs. The townspeople had to kowtow to his insufferable demands to be able get the invaluable commodity. He used extortion and relished making the Jews suffer, especially at times of high volume such as Erev Shabbat and Erev Yom Tov, the eves of the Sabbath and holidays. Everyone seemed helpless in the face of his domination.

The man had one daughter, who was the apple of his eye. She became very ill and lay in bed, writhing in pain. The doctors despaired. The wealthy magnate stood at her bedside, helpless, his fortune and power useless.

His friend had a suggestion. "Go to the righteous grandmother for a blessing for your daughter's recovery. You can't lose out."

Desperate times call for desperate measures. The spring owner went to the home of Rebbetzin Menucha Rochel. He encountered her grandson, Reb Zev Dov Slonim, and bombarded him with frantic shouts and pleas. Reb Zev Dov went to his grandmother's room and told her what the man wanted. She instructed her grandson to tell the man, in her name: If he promised to stop harassing the Jews of Hebron, his daughter's recovery was assured.

The magnate immediately agreed. He put his hand over his heart and swore that he committed to doing whatever the Tzadekes (holy woman) told him, then left the house in a rush. His daughter quickly recovered.

From that time on, he would be seen on Friday mornings, knocking on the doors of the Jewish homes, offering barrels full of fresh spring water.

Rebbetzin Menucha Rochel was a beloved and revered foundation of the Hebron community for 43 years. At the venerable age of 90, she sensed that her days were ending. She sent a letter to the current Rebbe - Sholom Dovber Schneersohn, the Rebbe Rashab - informing him of her imminent passing. Her remarkable longevity meant that she lived during the leadership of the first five Lubavitcher Rebbes. The Rebbetzin passed away on the 24th of Shevat, 5648 (1888). She was buried in the ancient Jewish cemetery in Hebron.

Menucha Rochel's descendants were important leaders in the community, which had a thriving Chassidic population by the time of her passing. Many family members were caught in the horrific riots of 5689 (1929), when 67 Jews were brutally massacred by Arab neighbors with whom they had lived peacefully for generations. Shlomo Slonim (5688-5774, or 1928-2014), one of the few survivors, was just a year old at the time.

By Miriam Karp

VAYEISHEV IN A NUTSHELL

The name of the Parshah, "Vayeshev," means "And he dwelt" and it is found in Genesis 37:1.

Jacob settles in Hebron with his twelve sons. His favorite is seventeen-year-old Joseph, whose brothers are jealous of the preferential treatment he receives from his father, such as a precious many-colored coat that Jacob makes for Joseph. Joseph relates to his brothers two of his dreams which foretell that he is destined to rule over them, increasing their envy and hatred towards him.

Simeon and Levi plot to kill him, but Reuben suggests that they throw him into a pit instead, intending to come back later and save him. While Joseph is in the pit, Judah has him sold to a band of passing Ishmaelites. The brothers dip Joseph's special coat in the blood of a goat and show it to their father, leading him to believe that his most beloved son was devoured by a wild beast.

Judah marries and has three children. The eldest, Er, dies young and childless, and his wife, Tamar, is given in levirate marriage to the second son, Onan. Onan sins by spilling his seed, and he too meets an early death. Judah is reluctant to have his third son marry her. Determined to have a child from Judah's family, Tamar disguises herself as a prostitute and seduces Judah himself. Judah hears that his daughter-in-law has become pregnant and

orders her executed for harlotry, but when Tamar produces some personal effects he left with her as a pledge for payment, he publicly admits that he is the father. Tamar gives birth to twin sons, Peretz (an ancestor of King David) and Zerach.

Joseph is taken to Egypt and sold to Potiphar, the minister in charge of Pharaoh's slaughterhouses. G-d blesses everything he does, and soon he is made overseer of all his master's property. Potiphar's wife desires the handsome and charismatic lad; when Joseph rejects her advances, she tells her husband that the Hebrew slave tried to force himself on her and has him thrown into prison. Joseph gains the trust and admiration of his jailers, who appoint him to a position of authority in the prison administration.

In prison, Joseph meets Pharaoh's chief butler and chief baker, both incarcerated for offending their royal master. Both have disturbing dreams, which Joseph interprets; in three days, he tells them, the butler will be released, and the baker hanged. Joseph asks the butler to intercede on his behalf with Pharaoh. Joseph's predictions are fulfilled, but the butler forgets all about Joseph and does nothing for him.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, 17 Kislev 5786 - 7 December 2025

Ezra Cries and Prays (348 BCE)

On this day in 3412 (348 BCE), 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.

Tuesday, 19 Kislev 5786 - 9 December 2025

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 5521 (1761) until his passing on 19 Kislev, 5533 (1772).

Liberation of Rabbi Schneur Zalman (1798)

On the 19th of Kislev of the year 5559 (1798), Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi - a leading disciple of Rabbi DovBer of Mezeritch 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."

Birth of Rebbetzin Menuchah Rachel (1798)

On the very day that Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi was liberated from prison, 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 5605 (1845), Rebbetzin Menuchah Rachel realized her lifelong desire to live in the Holy Land of Israel when she and her husband, Rabbi Yaakov Culi Slonim (d. 5617, or 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 5648 (1888). She is buried in Hebron.

Wednesday, 20 Kislev 5786 - 10 December 2025

Ezra's Address (348 BCE)

On this day in 3412 (348 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).

Thursday, 21 Kislev 5786 - 11 December 2025

Alexander in Jerusalem (313 BCE)

On 21 Kislev 3448 (313 BCE), there occurred the historic meeting between Shimon HaTzaddik and Alexander ("the Great") of Macedonia.

The Samaritans, bitter enemies of the Jews, had convinced Alexander that the Jews' refusal to place his image in their Temple was a sign of rebellion against his sovereignty, and that the Holy Temple should be destroyed. The Kohen Gadol ("High Priest") at the time was Shimon HaTzaddik, the last of the "Men of the Great Assembly" who rebuilt the Holy Temple and revitalized Judaism under Ezra. On the 21st of Kislev Alexander marched on Jerusalem at the head of his army; Shimon, garbed in the vestments of the High Priest and accompanied with a delegation of Jewish dignitaries, went forth to greet him. The two groups walked towards each other all night; at the

crack of dawn, they met. As Alexander beheld the visage of the High Priest, he dismounted his horse and bowed respectfully; to his men he explained that he often had visions of a similar-looking man leading him into battle. Shimon HaTzaddik brought the emperor to the Holy Temple and explained that Judaism prohibits the display of any graven image; he offered to name all the male children born to priests that year "Alexander" as a demonstration of loyalty to the emperor (which is how "Alexander" became a common Jewish name). The Samaritans plot was rebuffed, and 21 Kislev was declared a holiday.

(According to an alternative version, this episode occurred on the 25th of Tevet.)

Friday, 22 Kislev 5786 - 12 December 2025

Passing of Rabbi Eliezer ben Eliyahu Ashkenazi (1585)

Rabbi Eliezer ben Eliyahu Ashkenazi (5272-5345, or 1512-1585) was a highly regarded Talmudist, as well as a physician. He authored various works, including Ma'ase Hashem - 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.

Shabbat, 23 Kislev 5786 - 13 December 2025

Jews Accused of Poisoning Wells (1348)

As the "Black Death" plague decimated Europe, Christians accused the Jews of causing the plague by poisoning the wells to wipe out the Gentile population.

On the 23rd of Kislev 5109 (Nov. 15, 1348), Rudolph of Oron, bailiff of Lausanne, current-day Switzerland sent a letter to the mayor of Strasburg, current-day France, informing him that certain Jews of Lausanne had "confessed" under torture that they together with their coreligionists had poisoned all the wells in the Rhine valley. This resulted in the masses persecuting and killing tens of thousands of Jews throughout Europe.