

PARSHAT VAYIGASH

1 - 7 Tevet 5786
21 - 27 December 2025

Torah: Genesis 44:18 - 47:27
Haftorah: Ezekiel 37:15 - 28

PSALMS DAILY

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalm 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

Negative Mitzvah 237 Participation in a Loan in which Interest is Charged

We are forbidden from taking any active part in a loan that involves interest. We may not be the guarantor or witness for such a loan, nor may we act as the scribe who records it.

Negative Mitzvah 241 Taking Collateral from a Widow

It is forbidden for a creditor to take collateral for a debt from a widow—whether she is wealthy or poor.

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.

Through 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
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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 (grandfather), 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 shoachim (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

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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.

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THE MIRACLE

What is Chanukah? ... When the royal Hasmonean family overpowered and was victorious over [the Greeks], they searched and found only a single cruse of pure oil... enough to light the menorah for a single day. A miracle occurred, and they lit the menorah with this oil for eight days.

On the following year, they established these [eight days] as days of festivity and praise and thanksgiving to G-d. - Talmud, Shabbat 21b

Many miracles, great and small, accompanied the liberation of Israel from Hellenic dominance and the reclaiming of the Holy Temple as the lighthouse of G-d. But there is one particular miracle, the Talmud is saying, that is the sum and substance of Chanukah: the miracle of the small cruse of pure oil that burned for eight days. The challenge faced by the Jewish people at that time was unlike any that had confronted them before. Hellenism, a noxious blend of hedonism and philosophy, could not be resisted by the conventional tools of Jewish learning and tradition. Only the cruse of pure oil—the suprarational, supra-egotistical essence of the Jewish soul, from which stems the Jews intrinsic self-sacrificial loyalty to G-d could illuminate the way out of the mudswamps of Hella. Only by evoking this inner reserve of incontaminable oil were we able to banish the pagan invader from G-d's home and rekindle the torch of Israel as a light unto the nations.

But this was oil sufficient for only a single day. By nature, man's highest powers flare brightly and fleetingly, soon receding to the supra-conscious, supra-behavioral place from which they have come. When a person's deepest self is challenged, the essential oil of his soul is stimulated, and no force on earth can still its flame; but then the moment passes, the cataclysmic levels off into the routine, and the person is left with his ordinary, mortal self.

The miracle of Chanukah was that they lit the menorah with this oil for eight days—that the flame of selfless sacrifice blazed beyond a moment of truth, beyond a day of reckoning. That the small pure cruse of oil burned beyond its one-day lifespan for an additional week, illuminating the seven chambers of the soul (Kabbalistic teaching enumerates seven middot or basic character traits—love, restraint, harmony, ambition, devotion, bonding and receptiveness—from which stem all feelings and

motivations of the heart). This was no mere flash of light in a sea of darkness, but a flame destined to shed purity and light for all generations, under all conditions.

Thus the Talmud relates that it was only on the following year that these eight days were established as the festival of Chanukah. A year is a microcosm of time, embodying all of times seasons and transmutations. So it was only on the following year, after it had weathered all fluctuations of the annual cycle, that the victory of Chanukah could be installed as a permanent fixture in our lives.

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From the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe*

IN A NUTSHELL

The name of the Parshah, "Vayigash," means "And he approached" and it is found in Genesis 44:18.

Judah approaches Joseph to plead for the release of Benjamin, offering himself as a slave to the Egyptian ruler in Benjamin's stead. Upon witnessing his brothers' loyalty to one another, Joseph reveals his identity to them. "I am Joseph," he declares. "Is my father still alive?" The brothers are overcome by shame and remorse, but Joseph comforts them. "It was not you who sent me here," he says to them, "but G-d. It has all been ordained from Above to save us, and the entire region, from famine."

The brothers rush back to Canaan with the news. Jacob comes to Egypt with his sons and their families - seventy souls in all - and is reunited with his beloved son after 22 years. On his way to Egypt he receives the divine promise: "Fear not to go down to Egypt; for I will there make of you a great nation. I will go down with you into Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again."

Joseph gathers the wealth of Egypt by selling food and seed during the famine. Pharaoh gives Jacob's family the fertile county of Goshen to settle, and the children of Israel prosper in their Egyptian exile.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, 1 Tevet 5786 - 21 December 2025

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 (356 BCE).

Thursday, 5 Tevet 5786 - 25 December 2025

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

In 3327 (434 BCE), Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon invaded Judea, exiling King Jehoiachin

and thousands of Judean notables to Babylon. Eleven years later, 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 3339 (422 BCE). According to a minority opinion, this day is commemorated as a fast day.

Sefarim Victory (1987)

5 Tevet is celebrated as a day of rejoicing in the Chabad-Lubavitch community. On this date in 5747 (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.

Shabbat, 7 Tevet 5786 - 27 December 2025

Passing of Rabbi Tzvi, Son of the Baal Shem Tov (1780)

After the passing of the Baal Shem Tov (the founder of the Chassidic movement) on Shavuot 5520 (1760), Rabbi Tzvi succeeded him as leader of the Chassidic movement. Exactly one year later, Rabbi Tzvi announced to his disciples that his father had appeared to him in a vision and instructed him to transfer the leadership to Rabbi Dovber, the Maggid of Mezeritch.